



## Monitoring Report No. 2

### *Elements of Propaganda, Manipulation of Information and Violation of the Rules of Journalistic Deontology in the Domestic Mass Media*

*February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 – April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

*The report was developed by the Independent Journalism Center within the **Media campaign against false and biased information**, conducted by the Association of Independent Press (API), Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and Association of Independent TV Journalists (ATVJI).*

## **I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

During the period from February 1<sup>st</sup> – April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Independent Journalism Center monitored 12 media institutions – news portals and TV channels, to identify whether the broadcast journalistic materials contained violations of deontological rules and elements of informational manipulation. It was analyzed how these media reflected the events of public interest in politics, economy, and foreign policy, if there were respected the journalistic rules on verification of information from several sources, diversity of opinions, in order to ensure the balance of the conflict news, etc. Invoking the Journalist's Ethical Code and the scientific reference works allowed to detect methods and techniques used by Moldovan media to influence the wide public by spreading manipulating messages.

### ***The purpose of monitoring***

To establish whether the media, in addressing issues of public interest, respected the professional ethics or used procedures of manipulation, and to identify those processes. The monitoring was aimed, as well, to expose the mistakes of journalists, deliberate ones or not, in fact stating, so as that case studies and reports would have an instructive role. Another purpose of the monitoring was to help to increase vigilance of the media consumers when it came to risks of unsafe information sources. Thus, the monitoring helps consumers to understand how the media can manipulate, to be able to distinguish between a manipulator journalistic product and a product that reflects equidistant reality, and to encourage them to consult several sources of information when they have doubts in credibility of information.

### ***Criteria for selecting the monitored press institutions:***

- Coverage area – national and regional
- Language – Romanian and Russian
- Impact – circulation and audience

Print press: Ziarul National, Panorama (online versions of these publications);

Audiovisual: Publika TV (website publika.md), Prime TV, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR Vesti, Ren TV;

Online press: Gagauzinfo.md, Novostipmr.com, Sputnik.md, Deschide.md;

### ***Methodology***

There were selected political, economic and social events of major public interests, which occurred during the monitoring period, and based on the rules of Journalist Code of Ethics and the techniques for information manipulation, there was studied the way to reflect those events in the media. Also, there was analyzed a number of topical subject, such as court examination of the corruption case opened against the former Prime Minister Vlad Filat. There was analyzed the language and images used by journalists, the mode of selecting events for reflection, accuracy of source quoting, tone of exposure etc., in terms of the [Journalist's Ethical Code](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)<sup>1</sup>, of the guidelines and recommendations in

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<sup>1</sup> [http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

the field of quality and responsible media<sup>2</sup> and notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda** in the sense offered by the Dictionary of Sociology<sup>3</sup>.

**Manipulation** is defined as *'the act of making a social actor (person, group, community) think and act in a manner compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with his/her interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth giving the impression of freedom of thought and decision. Unlike the influence of the rational persuasion type, **manipulation** is aimed not to a more accurate and deeper understanding of the situation but to imprinting in the mind of a convenient understanding, falling back both on the misleading by using forged arguments and on the emotional non-rational levels'*.

**Propaganda** is defined as *'the systematic activity of transmission, promotion or dissemination of doctrines, theses or ideas from the standpoint of a particular social group and ideologies, in order to influence, change, form concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviors. The propaganda is performed in such way as to lead to the realization of the goals and interests of the group it serves, and there is no value-neutral or objective propaganda'*.

**The main subjects monitored during the period from February 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 are:**

- Voting the Law on Prosecution (February 23<sup>rd</sup> and February 25<sup>th</sup>)
- Peace Conference in Munich (February 13<sup>th</sup>)
- Release of 'Petrenco group' (February 22<sup>nd</sup>)
- General Assembly of Judges (March 11<sup>th</sup>)
- Manifestations Organized on March 2<sup>nd</sup> to Commemorate the 24<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Dniester War (March 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- Protests of Drivers and Owners of the Vehicles Registered Abroad (March 29<sup>th</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>)
- Protest Organized by the Party 'Platform of Dignity and Truth' on April 24<sup>th</sup>
- Court Examination of the Corruption Case against the Former Prime Minister Vlad Filat (Month of April)

## II. GENERAL TENDENCIES

Monitoring data shows that some journalistic materials were made with deviation from the deontological rules and with presence of characteristic elements of propaganda and informational manipulation practices, among which we should highlight:

**Selective presentation of the facts** – Deviation observed in particular in the news about protests in Chisinau on April 24<sup>th</sup> on [Publika.md](#), [Sputnik.md](#), [Newspmr.ru](#).

**Unilateral presentation of the facts** – News from a single source were posted on the website of [Publika.md](#), [Deschide.md](#) and aimed mainly to the hearings involving the LDPM leader Vlad Filat.

**Using anonymous sources without verification of information from independent sources** – Deviation recorded at the publication of news about defense witnesses in the case of Vlad Filat on [Deschide.md](#), [Publika.md](#), [Accenttv.md](#), [Rtr.md](#).

**Exacerbation of the facts** – unjustified emphasis, artificial intensification of facts and exaggeration of the scale of feelings, in order to promote certain messages or discredit individuals or groups.

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<sup>2</sup> *Style Guidelines Containing the Ethical Rules for Journalists*, API  
[http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid\\_Etica\\_Jurnalists\\_RO.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Jurnalists_RO.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Catalin Zamfir, Lazar Vlasceanu, *Dictionary of Sociology*, Bucharest, 1998, p.332, p.457.  
<http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/nccmn/images/1/1c/Dictionar-de-Sociologie-Catalin-Zamfir-Lazar-Vlasceanu.pdf/revision/latest?cb=20150813042511&path-prefix=ro>

Such methods were used by Jurnal TV in the news edition on April 24<sup>th</sup>, when they talked about the manifestation organized by the party “Platform of Dignity and Truth” against the leadership.

**Elimination of conflict subjects from the agenda of the media<sup>4</sup>** – The method was applied to discussions and adoption in Parliament of the final version of the draft Law on Prosecution on [Publika TV](#) and [Publika.md](#).

**Interpretation/commenting of the facts** – Violation of the Journalist’s Ethical Code, by which the journalist imposes its own opinion in informative materials on [RTR](#), [Sputnik.md](#), [REN TV](#).

**Elements of propaganda** – Deviation observed in the topics about the Munich Security Conference on [RTR](#) and some subjects about the criminal case, in which the defendant is Vlad Filat, on [Publika.md](#).

**Inaccurate quoting** and interpretation of source messages – Technique, by which the messages of the sources are selectively quoted and nuanced by journalist’s formulations, so as that the overall transmitted message would meet the interests of the transmitter on; method used by [Publika.md](#) in news about the protest in the center of Chisinau, on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Quoting the anonymous experts and repeating a false idea to confer it credibility.** These processes are identified in most news about the protest in the center of Chisinau, on April 24<sup>th</sup>, placed on [Publika.md](#).

**Labeling** – applying pejorative nicknames or marks or those ones of other nature, in order to weaken the authority of a person or to discredit such a person. The labeling was applied by [Jurnal TV](#) at the address of the politician Vlad Plahotniuc; by [Publika TV](#) when talking about businessmen Viorel and Victor Topa and by [Ziarul National](#) with regard to the businessman Ilan Sor.

**Headings/images**, video and audio effects – some media institutions selected photos and videos to put a negative spin on such subjects or groups, or used images that were only tangentially related to the topic of the article, but helped to emphasize the idea promoted in the text and, hence, to amplify the negative message they wanted to transmit to the public ([Publika.md](#), [Sputnik.md](#), [ZiarulNational.md](#)).

**Emotional manipulation** using music and lyrics in the newscasts on April 24<sup>th</sup>, placed on [Jurnal TV](#).

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

#### **Subject 1. Voting the Law on Prosecution (February 23<sup>rd</sup> and February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016)<sup>5</sup>**

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, at the meeting of the Parliamentary Commission for Legal Issues, Appointments and Immunities, there was discussed the draft Law on Prosecution and the package of laws to reform the system of declaration of incomes and interests of public officials. The two documents had a major relevance, involving reforms in the judiciary system and in the prevention of corruption, and their adoption was one of the conditions set by foreign partners of Moldova to continue borrowing to our country.

**Publika TV** completely ignored the subject of contradictory discussions within the Commission, where the democrat deputy Sergiu Sirbu and the Prosecutor General of that time Corneliu Gurin

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<sup>4</sup> Techniques for Manipulation of the Electorate through Marketing Research, PhD Thesis, Transilvania University <http://www.unitbv.ro/Portals/31/Sustineri%20de%20doctorat/Rezumat/Vierasu.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Case study, <http://www.media-azi.md/ro/node/316974>

proposed some amendments criticized by the authors of the project. The channel reported in two news and in the show *Newsroom* on the same day of February 23<sup>rd</sup> about another fact of the meeting of the Parliamentary Commission, namely, that the Ministry of Justice headed by the Minister from the Democratic Party submitted to the Parliament a draft Law, which provided for deprivation of mandates of those deputies, who did not declare properly their wealth and interests: [‘REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT: DEPUTIES RISKING LOSING THEIR JOB IF NOT DOING THIS’](#). In this case, they used the manipulation technique called *‘elimination of conflict topics from the agenda of the media’*<sup>6</sup>, in order to pass off the existing issues and the really relevant topics, substituting them with other positive and less stringent ones. Specifically, a relevant topic of public interest was replaced by one, wherein the representatives of a party, DP, appeared against an exclusively positive background. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016, when the Law on Prosecution was voted in final edition in the Parliament, without the amendments proposed by Sergiu Sirbu, since he withdrew them, Publika TV treated the subject briefly reserving 1.20 minutes for this news in the edition of *Newsroom*, which also included a video of Andrian Candu’s statement. However, there were reserved 2.31 minutes for another subject of the Parliament session – adoption of a declaration of intentions of the Legislative Body ‘on stability and modernization of the country’, which included a report from the Parliament, four videos of the deputies’ statements and a studio discussion with a Publika TV reporter. There was outlined the intention of *blurring* and *replacing the relevant issues of public interest with others of less actuality*.

*Ziarul National* treated multilaterally the subject, however, presentation of the facts was affected by *tendentiousness* manifested mainly by the heading and images, in one of the cases. That referred to the news headed [‘Babbling in the Parliament. Sirbu’s Way to Justify Why He ‘REJECTS’ the Troublesome Amendments to the Law on Prosecution’](#), which exposed the explanations of the PD deputy, related the fact that he quitted a few amendments to the draft Law on Prosecution he had proposed the day before. It became clear even from the heading that the news was not a neutral one and the reporter used ironic ‘rejects’ instead of neutral verb ‘give up’. In the text, there were used such expressions as ‘

Sirbu tried to redeem a faux pas’, ‘Sirbu was quick to explain’, ‘Sirbu tried to justify’, which had a pejorative connotation and should not be used in a neutral text. Similarly, the photo used to illustrate the text showed Sergiu Sirbu appearing with such a position of his lips that would suggest that he was in a state of confusion, in order to reinforce the message transmitted by the heading. Thus, the reporters nuanced the things they exposed by words and phrases, to demonstrate their attitude toward some subjects of the news.

The news broadcasted on *Jurnal TV* on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 and related to the discussions of the Parliamentary Commission for Legal Issues on the draft Law on Prosecution at that meeting, fell within the standards of equilibrium. The material lasted more than four minutes and contained video inserts of the statements of Tudor Deliu, Raisa Apolschi, Corneliu Gurin and Vlad Gribincea. Also, it was found a failure of separating facts from opinion by the statement ‘in defense of amendment PD deputy jumped general prosecutor’.

However, both the news ‘Scandal Related the Reform of the Prosecution’ and the news headed ‘Law on Prosecution Voted’ broadcasted on February 25<sup>th</sup> lacked the background or contextual information. The consumers were not informed why a new Law on Prosecution was necessary, why the deputies voted it exactly then, how long adoption thereof had been delayed, etc.

## Subject 2. Munich Security Conference (February 13<sup>th</sup>)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unitbv.ro/Portals/31/Sustineri%20de%20doctorat/Rezumate/Vierasu.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-conferinta-de-securitate-de-la-munchen-reflectata-de-posturile-rusesti-retransmise-republica-moldova/>

The news program '[Saturday News](#)' broadcasted by **RTR** Russia on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, at 08:00 p.m., contained a topic related to the Munich Security Conference, traditionally held every year and attended by the heads of state and Governments of different countries. The material broadcasted by Russian journalists was drafted in the style of an editorial and contained comments, appreciations and value judgments but did not comply with the requirements to the news, which should be based solely on the facts. Here is a fragment from the presenter's text: *'However, the incumbent president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko was obviously extremely nervous and sweaty, sitting at the panel of discussions in Munich, more due to some other reasons. Which? Our version is, possibly unexpected, that Poroshenko was influenced by the teachings of George Soros'*. The reportage included numerous fragments of speeches of the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov but the only video inserts less favorable for Moscow were those ones of the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaite. The subject lasting about 13 minutes or so comprised the author's opinions, which took the time almost equal to that one of the facts. The balance of sources was not respected, as well. Despite the fact that Petro Poroshenko attended the event, the reporters failed to insert into the topic any fragments of his speech or statements. This was despite the fact that, as we found out from [other media](#), Poroshenko made an appeal to the Russian President at Munich: *'Mr. Putin, there is no civil war in Ukraine, it is your aggression. There is no civil war in Crimea, there are your soldiers, who occupied my country. There is no civil war in Syria, there you bomb the civilian population!'*

As a conclusion, the Munich event was used by RTR to propagate the official policy of the Russian Federation to impose the point of view of its authorities, to hit into the opponent, to discredit him and to mislead people, not to inform the viewers. The channel journalists managed to do all this by selecting fragments from speeches and including them in the news, as well as by selecting the information about the event, intentionally breaking rules for assurance of the news balance, commenting the facts and launching accusations without any proofs.

**Ren TV** channel covered the event too, inclusively on its website, inserting 14 news on the topic, a majority of which contained ironical appreciations, expressions and opinions of the journalists, on the first conference day. [Example](#): *'The American politician voiced the requirements in an incomprehensible manner: it seems that Russia should ensure access of humanitarian cargoes in the districts of conflict and to release the hostages. Kerry, as usual, did not say anything concrete. It is not clear what humanitarian access he spoke about and what Russia has to do with this, as well as it is not clear what kind of 'prisoners' our country must free'*. In other news, **Ren TV** selected fragments from the speeches of some speakers, mostly on US-Russia and NATO-Russia relations, and broadcasted them shortly, unilaterally and in an unbalanced way, thus ignoring other subjects and opinions expressed at the conference.

### **Subject 3. Release of 'Petrenco group' (February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016)<sup>8</sup>**

On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, Riscani Sector Court of Chisinau municipality released six participants of the September 2015 protest in the front of the Prosecutor General's Office, including the former communist deputy Grigore Petrenco, from the detention center and placed them under house arrest, under the 'guarantee of socialist deputies'. They were released after the Socialist deputies submitted a guarantee to the court.

**Jurnal TV** echoed the accusations against the democrat Vlad Plahotniuc in its news lasting about four minutes and headed 'Petrenco Group, under House Arrest', even if Vlad Plahotniuc has no apparent relation to that subject. The structure of the news violated the principle of balance: it gave

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<sup>8</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-eliberarea-din-arest-grupului-petrenco-argumentul-emetiei-locul-informatiei-obiective-etichetare-tendentiozitate/>



priority to some sources against others. The author included two inserts of the statements of Petrenco, two more of the group's lawyer Ana Ursachi, one of Igor Dodon and an insert of the statements of a 'former party colleague' of Petrenco, Alexandr Petcov. All of them expressed the same opinion – the group had to be released earlier, and two of the speakers accused the justice of acting 'against Vlad Plahotniuc's order'.

The fact that journalists gave in their news an important space for accusations against Plahotniuc and did not make enough efforts to find the objective reality, such as to ask Igor Dodon why the guarantee was not submitted earlier, while 'Petrenco group' was in custody for six months, but only on the day when the prisoners were to meet the rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as Petrenco himself accused in his statement, indicated that the news was aimed, besides information sharing, to launch the accusations against Plahotniuc. Thus, the news was transformed into a **tendentious** product built by the techniques similar to those ones of manipulation, not of objective journalism.

**Publika TV** treated that subject in the news headed 'Igor Dodon, the Guarantor of Antifa Leader. Grigore Petrenco under House Arrest' and using the images taken from the Socialist leader's Facebook page but lacking the relevant details, such as a planned visit to the prison of the rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or the answer to the question why namely then the socialists submitted a guarantee for those six detainees. Instead of this, the text repeated several times the phrase 'extremist movement' that Petrenco allegedly led. Since the authors offered no other information about that movement, the viewer would remember only that it was an extremist one, a notion that might be associated with 'danger', 'hate', 'violence'. Thus, release from custody, which by itself was an informational opportunity for the news, was presented alongside with labeling of the central person, and that procedure resulted in creation of antipathy and rejection. The label 'leader of the extremist movement' was neither proven, nor necessary in the news, since Petrenco and his colleagues were accused of riots but not of extremist activities.

On the website of **Accent TV**, the subject was treated in three news: 'Socialist Deputies Claiming for Release of Petrenco Group, at Their Own Risk', 'Petrenco Group Released under the Guarantee of Socialist Deputies', 'Dodon: Release of Political Prisoners as Another Step to Victory'. So, Igor Dodon and Socialist deputies were presented as positive heroes fighting for release of 'political prisoners', however, the reporters failed to ask for a response to the accusations made by the released himself, who said that release was an attempt to keep away the group members from meeting the rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The journalists did not ask Igor Dodon why they claimed for release exactly then, given that Petrenco and his colleagues had been in custody for a half a year. Instead of this, one of the news quoted a touching message written by Igor Dodon on Facebook: '*Today, these guys will be at home with their relatives and loved ones. They will hug their mothers, wives and children. They will have dinner with their relatives. Finally, the children will see their fathers for the first time during a half a year. It is our main success for this moment*'. This was the way to revoke the 'argument of feeling', a process of manipulation appealing to emotionality, in order to give more credibility to a message, to the detriment of presenting the objective information and that one of rational nature.

#### **Subject 4. General Assembly of Judges (March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016)<sup>9</sup>**

The traditional General Assembly of Judges was held at the Republican Palace of the capital on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and in the course thereof, there were totaled the 2015 activities of the judiciary system and were highlighted the branch-wise problems. The president of the Superior Council of

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<sup>9</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-adunarea-general-a-judecatorilor-prestatia-ministrului-justitiei-vs-vocea-neauzita-magistratilor/>

Magistracy Victor Micu, the Minister of Justice Vladimir Cebotari and some judges came with speeches about the challenges in that sector. Since that was an annual event, given the fact that the Republic of Moldova was frequently criticized for corruption in the judicial system and for the lack of progress in the development of reforms in that sector recently, that topic was one of public interest.

**Publika TV** reported about the event in the news headed 'The Ministry of Justice Working to Restore the Confidence in the Judicial System' and based on the initiative of the Minister of Justice to sanction the judges and other public figures guilty of the fact that the Republic of Moldova had lost lawsuits at the European Court of Human Rights. This was despite the fact that the subject was older, i.e. the measures for recovery of damages incurred by the state due to losing certain cases at the Strasbourg Court were launched on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a month and a half before the event, hence, that information was related only tangentially to the Assembly. There was a **change of emphases and a camouflage** of other acts produced during the event, especially of the criticism uttered by some judges from the rostrum, with regard to political influence over the justice and to the corruption in the system. So, the audience was unable to find out what really happened there: who and what speeches uttered, what the magistrates thought about the problems in the system or the way how they responded to the accusation of the lack of trust or integrity.

**Sputnik.md** treated the subject in a similar manner, reproducing fragments of the speech of the Minister of Justice without balancing the news, as required by the journalistic standards<sup>10</sup>, with the reaction of the second sources, i.e. representatives of the criticized system (Superior Council of Magistracy, Supreme Court of Justice, courts).

**Prime TV** based the news on the initiative on recovery of the damages suffered by the state due to the actions of judges and other dignitaries too. Being headed 'Reform of the Justice Scaring the Magistrates', the news began with the statement '*The initiative of Minister of Justice to make financially responsible those, who were guilty of sentencing of Moldova at the ECHR, upset some magistrates*'. Both the heading and the phrase misled the consumers because it did not seem from that what followed that the reform would frighten or upset the magistrates.

**Ziarul National** and **Jurnal TV** focused on criticisms addressed to the system and to the opinions expressed by the judges and court presidents. **Ziarul National** headlined 'Harsh CRITICISM at the General Assembly of Judges. Minister of Justice Announcing the NEWS in the System' and quoted there the magistrate Tatiana Raducanu, who talked about the bad image of justice and urged the colleagues not to yield to any pressure when judging certain cases, as well as the Minister Cebotari with the information about innovations he wanted to introduce in the court administration. **Jurnal TV** aired the news lasting about five minutes, posted on the website and headed 'Taking Potshots at the Court of Justice'. The reporters of this channel offered more space to oral interventions of judges, including in the news a piece of the speeches of four magistrates, who had critical opinions about the Ministry of Justice and the Superior Council of Magistracy and talked about corruption in the system. When it came to the Minister of Justice, it was only announced that 'both the Minister of Justice and several magistrates' contradicted the SCM President, who said that quality of the justice acts had improved in 2015.

Reflecting such an event expressing several relevant opinions, the journalists had the task to quote sources so as to respect the balance of opinions and to present the facts in a manner as closer to the reality as possible. However, the information was presented to the public selectively, depending on the editorial policy of the media channel.



## Subject 5. Manifestations on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, to Commemorate Those, Who Fallen in 1992 in the Course of the Dniester War<sup>11</sup>

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, there took place several events to commemorate those, who lost their lives in the course of the 1992 Dniester war, including a meeting, which took place in Chisinau, with participation of the Government representatives. The veterans of the armed conflict laid the flowers and marched till the Memorial Complex in Pantelimon Halippa Street.

In its news bulletin at 07:00 p.m., *Jurnal TV* broadcasted the six-minute news placed earlier on the web-site under the heading '[Candu booed by the Combatants](#)'. The first video sequence in the news comprised the final part of the speech of the Parliament chairman Andrian Candu and the moment when the meeting participants were shouting 'It's a shame!'. Further, the journalists informed about the fact that the officials and veterans laid the flowers. Then there followed a grouping of voices of the participants of the Dniester war, saying that they were unsatisfied with their living conditions, but some of them explained why they had responded to Candu's speech in such a way. *'The nation's leadership turned their backs on us and does not respect us anymore. They reduced our benefits and everything else. They forgot about us. They forgot to give us apartments, they forgot to render us assistance...'*, – said one of the participants.

The reporters did not ask those interviewed what pension they had, so as that the TV audience would be able to assess whether it was small or big; what benefits had been annulled and when, during what Government. The veterans' opinions were presented so as that to render an impression that namely the actual leadership was responsible for annulment of benefits and for small pensions, although the actual leadership had been holding the power for less than two months... For the purpose of right information sharing, the journalists had to publish the official data about the amount of pensions and allowances, which the veterans and disabled servicemen of the Dniester war benefited from, which would comply with the [deontological rule](#) stipulating verification of the information. The same news included two video clips lasting, in total, for a minute or so, where two of the leaders of the party 'Platform of Dignity and Truth' Andrei Nastase and Alexandru Slusari criticized the leadership and made public statements.

Hence, the journalistic material lacked equilibrium and that very event was used to promote some political actors and, respectively, to smear some others, whose opinion was not included at all. There were prevailing the accusing opinions addressed to the leadership and the used sources transmitted the information, which was not checked by the reporters.

In the course of the day, *Publika TV* informed about commemorating events and the journalists combined the actions that took place in two localities – Cocieri, a village where battles took place in 1992, and Chisinau, in their [materials](#) broadcasted in the news bulletin at 07:00 p.m. The reporters discussed with three veterans, who narrated about the moments from the battle but did not refer to their actual life or to the county situation. That reportage also included a fragment from Andrian Candu's speech and the images were edited so as that there was **ignored** the reaction of those, who listened to him. As it was seen from other media sources, the veterans shouted 'It's a shame!...' Thus, there was reflected only a part of the facts.

*Accenttv.md* [announced](#) in those two news reflecting the subject about the fact that there would take place a march, and referred to the [commemorating action organized by the Party of Socialists \(PSRM\)](#) on the bridge over the Dniester river in the locality of Vadul-lui-Voda. The journalists informed just in the first proposition that the PSRM representatives laid the flowers on the bridge, and reproduced in the remaining part of the text the statements of the leader Igor Dodon with regard to the Dniester conflict and his promises related to settlement of the Transnistrian conflict through

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<sup>11</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-manifestatiile-din-2-martie-selectarea-faptelor-si-promovarea-politica/>

federalization of the Republic of Moldova, in case if the socialists took the power. The text was accompanied by photographs and a video sequence with Igor Dodon's statements. We may deduce from the way the event was reflected in, that the authors did not followed the goal to give the complete information to the consumers but contented themselves with a unilateral and selective approach. Moreover, the facts were used as a trigger for political promotion of the Party of Socialists and its leader.

#### **Subject 6. Protests of the Motor Vehicle Owners against Road Tax Increase (March 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016)<sup>12</sup>**

Several media sources informed on March 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> that tens of drivers blocked with their cars the access roads to Cahul-Oancea customs point, since they had a grudge against a provision from the budgetary and tax policy approved by the Government and related to increase of the road tax for the owners of the motor vehicles registered abroad. The owners of the motor vehicles registered in the Republic of Moldova took part in the protest too, claiming for non-increase of the fuel excise duties and taxes for car import.

The program [Newsroom dated March 30<sup>th</sup>](#) on *Publika TV* dedicated 10 minutes to this subject and included therein a reporter's live standup on the site, the news and the studio discussion with a journalist of that channel. Nevertheless, the material lacked one of the mandatory sources: protesting drivers. The journalists narrated about that event, however, they ignored the initiators and protagonists. The subject, in its essence, referred to a conflict between two parties – leadership and a group of people. The reasons of a party were ignored but the reasons of their adversaries were emphasized. Thus, there took place a **selective and unilateral presentation of the information**. This means that, according to the [Journalist's Ethical Code](#), a journalist shall ask for opinion of all subject-related parties. The reporters forgot to inform about the fact that another reason for protests was increase of the tax on vehicle import but the indignation due to increase of the fuel excise duties was announced in passing, in a journalist's live standup on the site. The studio discussion with the journalist Aleksandr Barbov, as well, was focused on dissatisfaction of the owners of the motor vehicles registered abroad, however, without mentioning the planned increase of the fuel excise duties, which would affect the entire population. The invitee presented several arguments for the Government's proposals and accused the owners of the motor vehicles registered abroad. As a consequence, *Newsroom* presented that protest in a manner favorable only for a part - leadership.

*Jurnal TV* [offered more details](#) about the protest, however, the news had the signs of disequilibrium, since the only source used was the drivers. The reporters neither included in the news the reasons of the Ministry of Finance for increase; nor the response of the authorities to the protest and to the accusations made by the participants was requested, although one of the accusations referred to the fact that *'increasing the taxes, the leadership tried to recover the billion stolen from the banking system'*. However, there was included, as a response, a background phrase saying that some days ago *'the Minister of Finance Octavian Armasu declared that the authorities were trying to find solutions for this case, but gave to understand that they would NOT renounce increase of the vignette'*.

#### **Subject 7. Protest Organized by the Party 'Platform of Dignity and Truth' on April 24<sup>th</sup><sup>13</sup>**

On 04.24.2016 Sunday, in Chisinau, there took place a protest action organized by the 'Platform of Dignity and Truth' and claiming for, amongst other things, conduct of early parliamentary elections

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<sup>12</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-nemultumirea-proprietarilor-de-autoturisme-fata-de-majorarea-taxei-de-drum-protest-fara-protestatari/>

<sup>13</sup> Case study <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-protestul-din-24-aprilie-de-la-chisinau-manipulare-si-dezinformare-en-gros/>

on the same day with the presidential election on October 30<sup>th</sup> cy. The manifestation started in the Great National Assembly Square but thereafter, the protesters surrounded the building of the Government. After that, they marched till the residence of the democrat Vlad Plahotniuc in Bulgara Street and to the location of GBC Company belonging to him, in Cantemir Avenue. There were confrontations in both places, between the demonstrators and the policemen, who formed the protective cordons but somebody from the crowd threw eggs and stones into the public order defenders. On the second day, the Minister of Internals announced that there had been open a criminal case on mass disorders and that 17 policemen had been wounded.

The elements of **fact concealment, mixture of truth and lies, and selective presentation of facts** may be distinguished in the [news broadcasted on the April 24<sup>th</sup> evening](#) by **Publika TV**. Example of the text: *'In some minutes, the protesters broke through the police cordon besides the building of the Municipal Prosecutor's Office in Bulgara Street'*. As a matter of fact, the protesters went to Bulgara Street, in order to picket the house, where Vladimir Plahotniuc lived. The police cordon was there namely due to that reason, but not in order to protect the building of the Municipal Prosecutor's Office, as it became known from the news. The journalists **concealed** the reason why the column of demonstrators had been exactly in that place. The fact that the information with the motifs was ignored in the news, might mislead the consumer and create an impression that the uncontrolled crowd had been destroying everything in their way and attacking the policemen. Another example: *'Another group of protesters went to an office building, broke through the police cordon, threw stones and tried to roll over a bus'*. An office building was not an object, whereto the demonstrators went accidentally, it was the headquarters of Global Business Center Company belonging to the politician and businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc, whom the demonstrators accused of capturing the state. There was also concealed the fact that the protest leaders had been calling the crown for calming down and stopping the acts of violence, and had been speaking of the risk of existence of some provocateurs. The news on **Publika TV** also lacked other relevant information on the protest, such as approval of a resolution, vindications formulated by the protesters, accusations of the Government, etc. Thus, the consumer found nothing but selective information about that event.

The majority of [news](#) about the protest, broadcasted on April 24<sup>th</sup> morning hours by **Publika TV** and **Publika.md** repeated the phrase *'The experts qualify this manifestation as an action of launching of the electoral campaign of the party 'Platform of Dignity and Truth', which is led from behind by the oligarchs Victor and Viorel Topa'*. Despite this, there was quoted none of the concrete experts, who would formulate that idea. Thus, there was made an attempt to pass off the protesters' vindications and, meanwhile, to establish credibility in the idea that there took place an electoral action. Other news on **Publika** operated with an **inexact quotation**, and this resulted in distortion of the initial message: ['CREHR Observers: Protests in the Capital Center Being the Acts of Severe Hooliganism'](#). The President of the Center for Resources for Human Rights Sergiu Ostaf listed in a Facebook post the preliminary conclusions of the CREHR observers on protest and said that throwing stones in policemen, i.e. an action taking place in Bulgara Street and in Cantemir Avenue, might be qualified as 'severe hooliganism'. The journalists divorced the qualification 'severe hooliganism' from the context and used it in the heading, extending it throughout the whole manifestation. In other words, the protest in the Great National Assembly Square was marked with no acts of violence. This procedure of manipulation through heading is acknowledged by the [specialists](#) as one of the most wide-spread, particularly, within the online medium, where the majority of consumers read and remember only headings. The similar, i.e. defective, manner was used [to quote](#), as well, a worker of the Delegation of the European Union to Chisinau, who wanted to keep the anonymity and who spoke to a reporter of [Newsmaker.md](#), wherefrom it was taken by **Publika**.

Invoking *RIA Novosti*, *Novostipmr.com* informed only about the reason for the protest and about the fact that the demonstrators surrounded the building of the Government. The other part of the facts – picketing of those two buildings and clashes with the police, **was ignored**.

Some news of *Sputnik.md*, broadcasted on April 24<sup>th</sup> **commented the facts and gave the value judgements** so as that the texts would reveal the authors' opinion. Example: the news [‘Protest Organizers Preparing their Alibi’](#) attested: *‘A TV-channel close to the ‘Platform of Dignity and Truth’ is preparing the site for the Sunday protest organizers to get off with a whole skin, in case if the manifestation overflows into violence’*. The presence of the reporter's opinion in the news contradicted the [Code of Ethics](#) binding the journalists to present the facts in a neutral manner and without appreciations.

The news on *Jurnal TV* [‘New Large-Scale Protest in the Capital’](#) showed a leader of the ‘Platform of Dignity and Truth’ naming from the rostrum the chairman of the Supreme Court of Justice Mihai Poalelungi ‘the most corrupted judge in the Republic of Moldova’, without asking for a response from the person viewed. Both [Publika TV](#) and [Jurnal TV](#) used the labelling ‘oligarch’ in all the news, wherein there was mentioned, respectively, the politician and businessman Vlad Plahotniuc, the owner of this channel, and the businessman Victor Topa, the owner of *Jurnal TV* channel, presently staying in Germany. **Labelling** was aimed to diminish credibility and to weaken authority of the persons viewed, and, as a consequence, might develop speech clichés and, later, thinking clichés.

The elements of **emotional manipulation through use of music and lyrics** were identified, as well, on *Jurnal TV*. The news bulletin on this channel at 07:00 p.m. broadcasted a [video fragment](#) that had the generic role, before and after the news block about the Sunday protests on April 24<sup>th</sup>. Against the background of the images with the crowd gathered in the Great National Assembly Square, there was heard the ‘Song of Sunrises’ by Alexei Mateevici, a composition having a pronounced message calling to revolts. The music and lyrics was appreciated as the means to generate the emotions and to manipulate emotionally the wide public. Use of such a procedure is accepted in case of movies, entertainment shows or documentaries but not in case of news bulletins. In this event, **Jurnal TV** channel substituted the protest organizers with itself and became a rostrum to call the people to manifestation.

The same [news bulletin on Jurnal TV](#) at 07:00 p.m. bore a sign of another technique of manipulation with the elements of propaganda – **exacerbation of facts**. This presupposed unjustified emphasizing, artificial intensification of the fact breadth and exaggeration of feelings, in order to promote certain messages or to discredit a person or groups. The same program dedicated 45 minutes of the total number of 49 minutes to the protest conducted in Chisinau. So, the rostrum speakers and their adherents in the crowd benefited from an extended space on Jurnal, even if many of them expressed them same ideas.

## **Subject 8. Court Examination of the Criminal Case Open against Vlad Filat<sup>14</sup>**

Several court hearings of the witnesses in the criminal case on influence traffic and passive corruption, open against the former Prime Minister Vlad Filat took place in April 2016. Since that was a subject of major public interest, i.e. it was the first time when a former Prime Minister was on the dock in the Republic of Moldova, the hearings were followed by the media, despite the fact that they were closed ones.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://mediacritica.md/studiu-de-caz-examinarea-instanta-dosarului-penal-deschis-pe-numele-lui-vlad-filat-putine-surse-si-mult-dat-cu-parerea/>



On **Publika TV** and **Publika.md**, some news related to this subject was based on the only source – prosecutor of that case, without verifying her affirmations and without presenting the lawyer’s reaction. An example would be the news ‘[New Witnesses Heard in the Case of Vlad Filat: ‘Subject of Accusations Being Fully Confirmed’](#)’ dated April the 9<sup>th</sup>. The text said that there was heard Iurie Leanca, Victor Bodiu, Veaceslav Ionita and Victor Barbaneagra, and that the prosecutor declared: ‘*The subject of accusations of Vlad Filat was fully confirmed, as a consequence of witnesses’ statements, particularly – the influences he had exerted on those people holding the senior positions in 2013, when there took place an additional issue of Banca de Economii shares*’. Other sources were not presented in the news. The journalists did not make any efforts to check and to prove the prosecutor’s words by interviewing the people she spoke about, i.e. the witnesses themselves, some of which made the remarks to reporters just after leaving the hearing. We might deduce from such an **ignorance** that the reporters wanted to render the only point of view – that one of the part of accusation, but deliberately forgot to interview the direct sources and the opposing side. **The facts were presented unilaterally**, this being a violation of clause 2.2 of chapter II of the Journalist Code of Ethics stipulating that ‘*a journalist should ask for opinion from all subject-related parties*’.

On the same day of April 15<sup>th</sup>, **Deschide.md** published the news<sup>15</sup> headed ‘[Exclusively. List of the Witnesses Vlad Filat Reliant on](#)’ and reproducing a list of 18 people, who were attested to be the defense witnesses but whose names were allegedly divulged by anonymous sources. Neither **Deschide.md**, nor media institutions taking this news – **Publika.md**, **Accenttv.md**, **Bloknott-moldova.md**, wherefrom it was taken from **Rtr.md**, made any efforts to verify the information or to ask the lawyer about the reaction.

The news ‘[Source: Administrator of Filat’s Facebook Page – Angela Gonta](#)’ was taken from an anonymous source too, presented as ‘very informed source’ and published on **Rtr.md**. It was taken from **Sputnik.md** and the text comprised a quotation of the prosecutor Adriana Betisor saying that the law-enforcement officers had identified the administrator of Filat’s Facebook account, however, his/her name was not divulged. The anonymous source, which said that such an administrator was the politician’s wife Angela Gonta, completed in such a way the prosecutor’s words. We should mention here that use of anonymous sources is not a practice of the quality journalism but, to the contrary, often serves to distribute false information<sup>16</sup>. Use of the information from the anonymous sources should be accepted only under certain conditions with a mandatory check in other independent sources.

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, when a new court hearing in Vlad Filat’s case took place, **Publika TV** broadcasted the news placed on the website under the heading ‘[Prison or Luxury Hotel? Conditions for Vlad Filat to Wait for a Sentence](#)’. Basing on an image taken from the portal **Today.md**, there was open the cell, wherein the former Prime Minister Vlad Filat was kept, and it was compared with a hotel: ‘*Vlad Filat lives alone in a cell in Penitentiary no.13, but the conditions, which he has been expecting the sentence in, are more like a hotel, than a prison*’. Thereafter, there was quoted a short statement of the accused’s lawyer, who told that the accused lived alone in the cell at that moment, and mentioned in passing that a new hearing in the relevant case took place that day.

The consumers found from [other media](#) about the fact that on the same day, the deputies of the PLDM fraction tried once more, after several attempts of the same kind, to submit a guarantee for release of Vlad Filat, however, the court dismissed their motion. **Ignorance of such information and change of the news accents** from the attempt of his colleagues (insisting on arrest inopportunity) to presentation of the detention conditions as luxury ones, offered a

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<sup>15</sup> <http://deschide.md/ro/news/politic/26398/EXCLUSIV--Lista-martorilor-în-care-pune-speranța-Vlad-Filat.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Case study. Stimulation of critical thinking in journalists.  
[http://www2.cji.ro/userfiles/file/Gandirea\\_critica/2\\_%20Scandalul%20Monica%20Macovei%20la%20Costi\\_nesti.pdf](http://www2.cji.ro/userfiles/file/Gandirea_critica/2_%20Scandalul%20Monica%20Macovei%20la%20Costi_nesti.pdf)



distorted reality to the wide public. The consumer would be left with an impression that Vlad Filat was ensured preferential conditions at the penitentiary.

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, when the judges extended Vlad Filat's arrest warrant for a 30-day period, there appeared the news on *Publika.md* '[Vlad Filat's Case: Chosen Defense Witnesses Not Hurrying to Come to Help the Former Prime Minister](#)'. Despite the fact that the information was presented again from the only source, i.e. the prosecutor, the reporters mentioned only in passing about real news – extension of the arrest warrant for another month, and focused on the information they had broadcasted earlier (that the defense would have problems with witness summoning). This might be understood as **an ignorance and repetition for the manipulator purposes**. Hence, there was made an attempt to pass off the fact that, despite the requests of the defense and party colleagues, Vlad Filat was still kept in custody, and, meanwhile, to establish credibility of the idea that the accused had nothing to defend himself with, since his witnesses did not want to bear testimonies.

Some of the news about Vlad Filat's proceedings, placed on *Publika.md* and *Sputnik.md* were accompanied by the photographs, wherein the former Prime Minister was caught with various grimaces that might be interpreted as expressing [confusion](#), [dissatisfaction](#), [discomfort](#) or [non-esthetic positions](#). The video or photo images are used in journalism to witness from the scene, to establish credibility of some information or to help the consumer to understand the message better. When there are no images of the event, the journalists may use archive photographs or videos that are related to the subject, they narrate about. As for the above cases, although there was a possibility to place some photographs or video spots made before or after the court hearings, the journalists decided to attach to the texts some old photographs of Vlad Filat, some of them being made in Parliament but not transmitting any subject-related message and, to the contrary, presenting him in unfavorable circumstances.

In the news referring to this subject and broadcasted by *Ziarulnational.md* on April 13<sup>th</sup>, '[Court Hearings in Filat's Case May Be Public. The Defense Witnesses Coming to the Court](#)', the businessman Ilan Sor was presented as 'controversial Ilan Sor'. Labelling, especially in the news, is a practice not conforming to the deontological rules. The communication specialists include labelling within the techniques of informational manipulation, arguing that it contributes to creation of some speech clichés that, in their turn, would lead to thinking clichés<sup>17</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

- A part of the monitored media institutions reflected the events that were the subject of this study, in a manner deviating from the Journalist Code of Ethics, namely: they transmitted information from the sole source, exaggerated the facts, presented commented information and used labeling, to the detriment of well-balanced information sharing and opinion pluralism. The cases of violation of the deontological rules and use of the techniques for informational manipulation were particularly stated when narrating about the internal events bearing the major political backgrounds and about the subjects of external policy related to conflict situations.
- The elements of informational manipulation and propaganda were stated in the news of **Publika TV, RTR, REN TV, Jurnal TV, Sputnik.md, Accenttv.md.**

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<sup>17</sup> Bogdan Ficeac, Manipulation Techniques, <http://www.docfoc.com/bogdan-ficeac-tehnici-de-manipulare-5654bd36deb8d>

- In the subjects related to the political sphere, a part of the monitored institutions looked with favor on some political actors but was malicious to others in the texts and images, thus presenting the facts in a distorted way.
- The institutions that broadcasted the Russian-language content, presented the events in Russia, Ukraine and Syria from a point of view that was exceptionally favorable for the Russian Federation (by selecting the subjects, formulating the text, combining the images and drafting the subjects and headings), without ensuring the complete and equidistant information sharing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- When realizing the news and drafting the news editions as a whole, the media institutions should be governed exclusively by the rules of the Code of Ethics and by the quality standards in journalism, in order to reflect the reality in a proper way and to offer the objective, equidistant and clear information to the wide public.
- The journalists should abandon the practices of: unilateral presentation of the facts; using the anonymous sources without verifying the information; and commenting the information, if such practices are not included in the opinion shows or rubrics.
- The editors and proofreaders, who take and rebroadcast the news from other channels, should complete the information broadcasted and should verify it in independent sources, in the event if such news is not complete or comes from anonymous sources.
- The media institutions should select the subjects, depending on the public interest but not on other criteria, such as political or any other interests of the media trust owners.
- The media institutions should not substitute the political groups with themselves, when they criticize the situation in the country or call the people to manifestations or revolts. The journalists shall have the mission of narrating the facts in an equidistant and neutral manner.
- The owners and heads of the media institutions should refrain from transforming the media means into tools of propaganda and manipulation with the public opinion.
- The Coordinating Council on Audiovisual should monitor the way, in which the broadcasting organizations ensure the opinion pluralism and abide by the autochthonous laws, as well as to the European rules in the audiovisual sphere, when it comes to correct, objective and pluralist information sharing, and should make inquiries, if required.
- The media consumers are recommended to get informed from several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving erroneous and manipulating information.

***This report was developed by the media expert Viorica Zaharia***